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Soviet Spies Got Data on Satellites Intended for Monitoring Arms Pact

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LOS ANGELES, April 28 — Information about several secret satellite systems that the United States expects to use to help verify the proposed strategic arms treaty with the Soviet Union were purchased more than two years ago by Soviet intelligence agents, according to documents made available to The New York Times.

The loss has never been made public by the Carter Administration.

Two Californians, Andrew Daulton Lee, 27 years old, and Christopher John Boyce, who are serving long terms in Federal prisons, were convicted here in the spring of 1977 of having attempted to sell documents to Soviet agents in Mexico City concerning a proposed Central Intelligence Agency satellite system called Pyramider, which was never built.

Data Concealed at Trials

But the National Security Council and the Justice Department concealed at their trials — and it was not disclosed until now — that the two men had sold data about two functioning C.I.A. intelligence systems, called Rhyolite and Argus, as well as other satellite systems used by the agency. The two convicted spies outlined the nature of the data they had sold to agents of the K.G.B., the Soviet intelligence service, in debriefings with the C.I.A. and Federal Bureau of Investigation after their conviction. Copies of transcripts of the debriefings were obtained by The New York Times.

The C.I.A. and National Security Council have refused to discuss the losses. In Washington, Jody Powell, the White House press secretary, said today: "I can't say anything so far because I don't know anything about it, so to speak." He promised to look into the matter further.

President Carter and Secretary of Defense Harold Brown have insisted that this country has the ability to verify Soviet compliance with a strategic arms treaty, and implicit in their remarks has been the assurance that the United States has a wide variety of means to monitor tests and that no single system is indispensable.

The Rhyolite and Argus satellites, said to have been unknown to the Russian until they learned about them from the two Californians, are used to intercept telemetry signals transmitted by Soviet missiles during test launchings. Along with stations on the ground and other intelligence sources, they have been used by C.I.A. analysts to plot the evolution of Soviet ballistic missiles and their improved atmospheric re-entry systems.

Both of the satellite systems were developed for the agency by TRW Systems Group, a California aerospace concern where Mr. Boyce was employed for more than two years.

Aerospace experts here who have worked on reconnaissance satellites have speculated that the C.I.A., after discovering the Rhyolite and Argus security breach, probably acted to minimize the damage and began work on other systems with some of the same capabilities.

These sources said that the more the Russians know about the American satellite systems, the easier it would be to mount a counterintelligence effort aimed at thwarting the satellites' value.

Could Design Countermeasures

Knowing technical specifications and other data, the sources said, would make it easier to design countermeasures, which could include physical camouflage of relevant defense sites during the passing of satellites or transmission of erroneous data to satellites to deceive them.

The Soviet Union began encoding telemetry signals from their test missiles about six months after the arrest of the two Americans, although it is unknown what relation, if any, that encoding had with the K.G.B.'s discovery of the Central Intelligence satellite system.

The question whether the United States can adequately verify Soviet compliance with the strategic arms agreement has become one of the most controversial issues in the debate over the projected treaty. President Carter has repeatedly given assurances that the United States has the ability to do so.

The recent loss of two C.I.A. stations in Iran that monitored Soviet missile tests during the initial phases of their launchings has aroused concern among some senators, who have said it is not certain that the United States could detect any Soviet cheating on an agreement.

What the C.I.A. and F.B.I. show and what has not been made public is that Soviet agents probably had some information about the Keyhole system more than a year before the arrest of Mr. Kampiles and that the Russians had obtained significant information about other satellites from the two Californians.

At their trials, Mr. Boyce testified that he had been coerced into spying by Mr. Lee, a boyhood friend who was a heroin addict, and Mr. Lee said that Mr. Boyce had told him they were working for the C.I.A. to give wrong information to the Russians.

From April 1975 to December 1976, shortly before they were arrested, the two men acknowledged selling documents to Soviet agents in Mexico and in Vienna, for which they received more than \$80,000.

Was \$140-a-Week Clerk

Mr. Boyce worked as a \$140-a-week clerk in a communications vault transmitting coded messages between the TRW plant and the C.I.A. headquarters in Langley, Va., and other stations.

At their trials, Justice Department prosecutors alleged that the men had sold thousands of classified documents to the Russians, but the only document referred to during the trial was a study involving the Pyramider, the aborted project intended to relay secret messages from American spies in hostile foreign countries to the agency's headquarters at Langley.

What was not disclosed, except in the debriefing transcripts, was that through the two men the Russians obtained copies of documents giving technical specifications, operating characteristics and other details of Rhyolite and Argus satellites over a long period.

Positioned in a stationary orbit about 22,000 miles over Asia, Rhyolite satellites contain a network of antennas that can intercept telemetry signals from Soviet missiles as they arc into space and deliver dummy payloads in Eastern Siberia or in the Pacific Ocean. The system can also monitor Chinese missile tests.

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CWA 4.02 Pyramider
Lee, Andrew
Boyce, Christopher
CWA 4.02 Argus
CWA 4.02 Rhyolite
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CIA 1.04 Kampiles, Wm.
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